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# Empowerment Through Cultural Identity: an Examination of the Alternative Education of Kusi Kawsay Academy

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## Abstract

TITLE: EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CULTURAL IDENTITY: KUSI KAWSAY

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Major: Business Administration

Minors: Politics and Communications

Advisor's name: Dr. Jude Fokwang (Sociology)

Reader's name: Dr. Daniel Wessner (Politics)

**Abstract:** This thesis examines the educational and organizational model of the Kusi Kawsay Academy in Peru to determine how the academy leads to empowerment of youth. This paper argues the innovative approaches of the Kusi Kawsay Academy also serve as an example for all NGOs operating in developing communities and affirms the recent concepts in development that state organizations can best achieve success through being highly knowledgeable about the cultural context and having high degrees of community involvement. A central ingredient to this alternative approach by the Kusi Kawsay is the fact that the academy is founded and operated by community members and parents of indigenous children. In this thesis, the reader further understands how the Kusi Kawsay Academy serves as an example to schools and nonprofits operating in other less-developed communities around the world and leads to educational empowerment through honoring cultural identities.

**EMPOWERMENT THROUGH HONORING CULTURAL IDENTITY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE  
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION APPROACHES OF KUSI KAWSAY ACADEMY**

**A thesis submitted to  
Regis College  
The Honors Program  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Graduation with Honors**

**by**

Jace Prokupek

**May 2015**

**APPROVAL PAGE**

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## Preface

Before coming to Regis University, community development seemed easy. Raise money → Build (schools, wells, shelter, etc.) → Repeat. However, like many of my assumptions pre-college, I discovered the complexities of developing communities located in the Global South. The key idea in development I was never introduced to before Regis was the importance of empowerment. The fascination with these complex processes fueled my desire to write about an organization that provided for a community in need and empowered them at the same time. After hours of researching, holding discussions with faculty, writing copious notes, scribbling down the exclamations of excited Peruvians during Skype interviews and working an internship at the Posner Center for International Development, I feel confident I have created a thesis that adds to the conversation about how one achieves educational empowerment. To examine this issue, I will use the Kusi Kawsay Academy in Písac, Peru which is a grassroots organization that aims to educate children through a blended approach using Waldorf techniques and honoring students' native culture. Throughout this thesis, I hope the reader considers the processes and methods Kusi Kawsay uses to procure educational empowerment for a previously marginalized group of students.

## Acknowledgements

First, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Jude Fokwang. Fifteen months ago, I was a stranger who waltzed into his office with dreams of going to Africa and becoming an expert in development. While neither happened, I genuinely appreciate his willingness to take on this project, and his guidance through the complex process of understanding educational development and cultural context in less-developed countries. As an advisor, his expertise in his field is a constant resource to my project and I greatly respect him as an academic.

Besides my advisor, I would also like to sincerely thank my reader, Dr. Daniel Wessner for providing comments and critiques throughout my writing process. Dr. Wessner's extensive and comprehensive knowledge of NGOs, development, the Global South, cultural sensitivity, empowerment and many other areas my thesis covered has made my final paper much stronger. Thank you for being a critical, but insightful, voice through my thesis process.

Additionally, I want to thank Dr. Alexander, who introduced me to the Kusi Kawsay Academy and who has helped facilitate my research. He has also provided insights I do not have because I was not able to visit Peru. I sincerely appreciate his help during the IRB approval process and research collection.

Another thank you also goes out to Dr. Howe and Martin Garner for directing the honors students through this thesis process. Thank you for encouraging us to reach our full academic potential and undertake this enriching project.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, brother and friends for continuously supporting me. The opportunities and achievements I have today would not have been possible without the exceptional people in my life that support me.



## Chapter 1: Introduction and Thesis Statement

### Introduction

Situated in Písac, Peru there is a small academy of modest structure built in the Andes mountain region in the heart of the Sacred Valley. From the front step of the school, one can see clearly over the valley and view the imposing mountain range. By absorbing the views offered by this academy, one can feel a rich sense of history in this area of the world. The century-old slopes stand as a constant reminder of the past to the community in Písac and the community's dedication to this ancestral land is clear. The institution described here is the Kusi Kawsay Academy which is an alternative education school located in Peru not far from Cusco. The school was founded in 2010 with a focus on preserving and celebrating indigenous students' native heritage (Kusi Kawsay, 2014).



Above is the facility Kusi Kawsay operates in, still in construction due to unavailable funds to finish the school (Dayka, 2012).

Founding parent Fielding Wood, claims previous schools did not focus on cultural heritage and this made students believe “in order to function in the modern world, they have to give up their cultural identity” (Kusi Kawsay, 2014). The organization started with the intent of working within the Peruvian public school system (which has almost reached universal education) to incorporate more teachings on students' cultural identity; however, due to a lack of interest and support from the government, the founding parents instead decided to create their own institution where they could dedicate their time and resources to seeing the benefits of building a curriculum based off students' native cultural heritage and further cultivate students' creativity and emotional intelligence through the Waldorf approach.

Throughout this project, I asked the questions: what education approach in primary school empowers indigenous youth in this region? How does one define and measure empowerment? What is the value behind honoring a student's native culture? And finally, what does an educational approach that blends a Western model and Andean concepts look like? From my research focused on the Kusi Kawsay Academy I have begun to answer some of my guiding questions.

**Thesis Statement:** The Kusi Kawsay Academy models educational empowerment of indigenous Andean youth by focusing on youths' cultural identity through alternative approaches of education and high degrees of community involvement.

In *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* by Deepa Narayan-Parker the author concedes that empowerment must be able to be measured if it

is to be considered in development policy making and programming (Narayan-Parker, 2005). Because this thesis claims the approach of the Kusi Kawsay Academy empowers youth, measuring this empowerment is an important aspect of this project. Narayan-Parker discusses many elements of empowerment, and how to measure this concept (Narayan-Parker, 2005). I believe the most applicable measure of empowerment in this context comes from self-respect of ethnic identity. Historically, one's ethnic identity can be sources of oppression if a certain population is made to feel their culture is subpar by the hegemony. In Peru, indigenous culture has been oppressed, similarly to Native American culture in the United States, and the Kusi Kawsay Academy attempts to honor ethnic identity through various cultural programs, incorporation of native tongue and other methods, to empower youth to be proud of their Andean culture and therefore become optimistic of their abilities, their culture and their community.

## Chapter 2: Key Concepts and Context

I was introduced to the Kusi Kawsay Academy by Dr. Paul Alexander, a Regis faculty member, who has worked with the organization on fundraising efforts and organizational structure. My original thesis topic of empowering indigenous communities through nonprofit organizations lent itself to examining and focusing on Kusi Kawsay. This organization was a product of a grassroots movement by Peruvian families who felt the state-run school system did not respect indigenous students' cultural heritage and did not focus on honoring the Andean way of life. To correct this, the founding parents started the academy focused on Andean ideas, blended with a Waldorf method and other more modern means of education. The result is a blended approach enriched through students' cultural identity.

The academy is a private 501(C)(3) public charity which operates without a heavy influence of the Peruvian government (other than licensing requirements). The learning model employed by the Kusi Kawsay Academy sets this organization apart from other schools in Peru. The model is a blend of Waldorf techniques and deeply rooted in the Andean culture. The school calendar revolves around the Andean harvest calendar, children gain a comprehensive understanding of the history of the indigenous people, Andean cultural celebrations are observed and when discussing school policy changes all decisions are reached by general consensus, in an assembly fashion of Andean tradition.

Through this project, I hope to examine how the Kusi Kawsay Academy stands apart from schools in Peru and other educational institutions operating in developing



countries. This thesis does not aim to devalue the progress achieved by state-run schools or nonprofit organizations, and does not make universal claims about the work of every educational organization, however, after reviewing literature and studies on this topic, one can see educational intuitions operating in developing communities should be examined with a more critical eye to ensure the community and youth empowerment is achieved.

### Why does this matter?

This section hopes to illustrate why examining the structure, methods and effects on the native culture matters to society as a whole. My thesis primarily focuses on education NGOs for several reasons. First, the role of NGOs has expanded by a drastic amount in the last few years. According to authors Werker and Ahmed from Harvard University, one needs to consider the increase in World Bank funding to understand the expanding role of NGOs. In the late 1980s only 6-percent of World Bank funding went to NGOs working on developing ‘civil society’ or projects revolving around education and access to basic-needs, which pertain to the creation of civil society. However, in 2006 over 70 percent of funding went to NGOs working on civil society initiatives (Werker, 2008).

This expanding role of NGOs formulating civil society in developing countries makes it more important today, as opposed to any other time before, to critically examine how NGOs are defining civil society and what priorities are placed on the various aspects of civil society. Educational values are a precursor to developing a version of civil society, and to effectively examine these issues, this paper will look at various examples

of education NGOs and evaluate the claims that the hybrid model used by Kusi Kawsay leads to empowerment for indigenous people.

### **Kusi Kawsay Context and Current Situation**

The environment the Kusi Kawsay Academy operates in is also important to consider. Currently, Peru ranks last in education out of all of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (Collyns, 2014). This requires serious attention to the education system in the country and calls for creative education programs to address this problem and reach Peruvian youth.

The Kusi Kawsay Academy operates with limited Peruvian governmental control. According to the Economist article titled “Corruption in Peru: A Widening Web” published in May, 2013 “corruption is the second-biggest concern among Peruvians, following crime. [A] survey also found that 90% of people do not report graft (use of power for political gain). People don’t react, because they have no faith in the authorities, institutions or the law” (L.C., 2013, p.1) the article also points out that in Peru “nearly a quarter of Congress members have faced ethical hearings on corruption charges” (L.C. 2013, p. 1). Because of this environmental and political context, the founding families of the Kusi Kawsay Academy decided to create a school that was privately ran to ensure the organization would focus on alternative methods of learning that honored the indigenous culture.

Next, one must consider the Kusi Kawsay’s location near Cusco, Peru, once known as the “navel of the universe” or conceptual center of the universe in Incan times. In the city of Cusco, “the Incas developed a complex urban center with distinct religious

and administrative functions which were perfectly defined, distributed and organized” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 1). The Incan empire developed an intricate and culturally rich heritage that can still be witnessed in modern times. The embedded religious and political beliefs in the Andean region provide the basis for a majority of culture Kusi Kawsay teaches from and strives to preserve. The city of Cusco and region where Kusi Kawsay is located provides “unique testimony to the urban and architectural achievements of important political, economic and cultural settlements during the pre-Columbian era in South America” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 1). As the Incans expanded their empire through South America, their calendar, administrative systems, religious ideology and agricultural practices all developed and created a unique culture in the Andean region.

Finally, one must examine the background of the academy. The school was founded in 2010 and currently serves 95 students. Of those students, about 90 have families from indigenous backgrounds and come from the communities of: Viacha, Cuyo Grande, Cuyo Chico, Amaru, Anphay, Pampallaqta and Chahuaytire near Písac, Peru.



Above is the Sacred Valley where the Kusi Kawsay Academy is located (Kusi Kawsay, 2012).

The photo above demonstrates the terrain of where the academy is located, and many of the communities students come from are in remote locations in the upper regions of the valley. In the Quechuan language, Kusi Kawsay means “good life.” The academy is a primary and secondary school with 20 teachers serving kindergarten through grade 10. Another unique aspect of this academy is that students pay tuition at the academy on a sliding scale. The academy takes into consideration a student's family income when charging tuition. Because of this, some students attend for free. A student on the lower end of the income scale is charged about 30 Peruvian soles a month (9.70 USD). Students from wealthier areas of Cusco or Lima may pay around 85-100 soles per month (27.50-32.30 USD). And students from families from North America or Europe may pay up to 200 soles (64.60 USD) per month.

### Key Concepts

Next, this paper aims to define key concepts in the research that will further the readers’ understanding of educational empowerment.

- **Empowerment:** One of the keys words in the thesis statement of this paper is “empowerment,” and one of the main claims of this paper is that this blended education model empowers indigenous youth and the community. However, before continuing, one must define what empowerment means when used in the context of this issue.

Empowerment is defined as the ability for indigenous communities to create their own civil society, according to Grodsky in his article titled “Co-optation or Empowerment? The Fate of Pro-Democracy NGOs after

the Rose Revolution,” Civil society can be understood to be “the realm of organised life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules” (Grotsky, 2012, p. 330). Empowerment is seen as the ability for native community members to create their own idea of civil society and find solutions to injustices with minimal intervention from Western cultures and organizations. Kabeer (2001) offers an additional definition of empowerment that states empowerment is “the expansion of peoples’ ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Narayan-Parker, 2005, p. 78).

- **Dependency Theory:** Explored by sociologist Andre Gunder Frank, this theory argues the notion that resources flow from poor and underdeveloped states to a ‘core’ of wealthy states which enriches developed states at the expense of less-developed countries. Thus, many of these structures still present in formerly colonized countries enforce or deepen dependency and delay development (Frank, 1967).
- **Education model and blended models:** An Education model is defined as “the act or process of acquiring knowledge, especially systematically during childhood and adolescence” (Hanks, 1979, p. 380). These models can be more generally described as guidelines, policies, approaches and ideologies about education for youth. For example, the Waldorf model stresses not teaching literacy until grade 2 and does not expose children to

technology until much later. There is also an emphasis on minimal testing, and cultivating “discovery” in the learning process. All of these elements create an education model that certain institutions follow.

- **NGOs:** A non-governmental organization (NGO) is “any nonprofit or voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national or international level” (NGO.org, 2014). The Kusi Kawsay Academy is identified as an educational NGO because the organization began as a school for children and the organization operates outside of the state-run education system in Peru. The organization is not controlled by government (outside of general licensing requirement) and is not a private entity returning investments to investors.
- **Western Education Model:** The broad definition of a Western education model (whether British, American, French, etc.) is any educational approach that focuses on “banking education.” The idea behind this concept is students are “banks” a teacher needs to fill with knowledge. The term “banking education” was coined by Paulo Freire to describe and critique the traditional model of education where a teacher gives information to students and then students demonstrate their knowledge. In this model, used by a majority of schools operating in developed countries and less-developed countries, the teachers issue commands and students receive, memorize, and repeat (Freire, 1985). These models are very test-

focused and many institutions use Western texts and concepts to relay information to students.

- **Alternative education:** An alternative to some banking education methods critiqued by Freire would be student-centered models or models that promote emotional, spiritual, and humanistic growth. In contrast, the traditional models of education focus on scientific explanations and transmitting knowledge to students. Examples of alternative models would be indigenous methods of education (where experience is the primary teacher) and the Waldorf method.
- **Culture:** As defined by Jack Donnelly in Universal Human Rights, culture is defined as “a site of difference and contestation, simultaneously ground and stake of a rich field of cultural-political processes” and cultural absolutism provides an “absolute standard of evaluation” (Donnelly, 1989, p.67) of the society and cultural norms.
- **Civil Society:** The idea of civil society should “describe the society [a culture] has or aspires to; one that is associated with positive social virtues such as the common good, democracy, tolerance and civility” (Suliman, 2013, p. 245). An education structure, religious beliefs, societal agreements, access to basic necessities, etc. all form and influence this idea of civil society.
- **Waldorf Education:** Waldorf education is defined as a model that is “based on a profound understanding of human development provides a

detailed, richly artistic curriculum that responds to and enhances the child's developmental phases, cultivates social and emotional intelligence, connects children to nature and ignites passion for lifelong learning. (WhyWaldorfWorks.org, 2014)

### **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

To examine the Kusi Kawsay Academy, one must understand the previous research around education in developing countries. Through this literature review, I will further explain the importance of alternative education NGOs, elaborate on previous failings of some organizations who do not consider community context, and present scholarly research supporting the formation of education organizations in tune with local culture.

The Kusi Kawsay Academy stands apart from other educational NGOs for several reasons that have been criticized by sociologists for decades. For one, the curriculum and school culture is based entirely around honoring and celebrating children's ethnic identity. In contrast, in the article "Racial and Ethnic Stratification in Educational Achievement and Attainment" authors Grace Kao and Jennifer Thompson argue many curricula of schools in developing countries operated by NGOs are supporting "unintentional racism." This concept is based on the idea of unintentionally portraying certain races negatively. They affirm that books and materials used in certain classes "support a negative image of ethnic minorities" (Kao & Thompson, 2006). For example, teaching students English can be a beneficial skill that many NGOs support in their



education model. However, teaching primarily in English disregards students' mother tongue and makes the native language seem "unacceptable" and "second rate" (Kao & Thompson, 2006). Carole Bloch, director of the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa, acknowledges the benefits of teaching students in their native language, and is heading an initiative to create programs aimed at honoring cultural traditions for children in South Africa. Bloch states: "By the time children are five, their brilliant young minds have helped them to learn how to think and communicate in their home language. And, when you read to children in their home languages, you give them a strong foundation for learning language and developing their literacy skills" (Bloch, 2014, p. 8). The article adds that in South Africa, "Only 8.2 percent of South Africans speak English as a mother tongue, what happens to the 1/3 who can't speak English at all?" (Bloch, 2014, p. 8). Since the entire state-run and most NGO education institutions in South Africa teach in English, this can present a problem for students living in rural areas who are unable to demonstrate their knowledge through a language that is foreign to them.

Pierre Bourdieu offers an additional view why the ruling class may promote education policies that marginalize the lower classes. In Bourdieu's text, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, he acknowledges that, historically, the wealthier classes crafted the current education systems. Therefore, the perspective on how to deliver education was always developed by the ruling class, and used as a way to maintain the status quo. Bourdieu argues that the important part in education is not what is known but rather "the manner in which it is presented" (Bourdieu, 1970, p. 253). As seen today,

there are academic skills and abilities that are universal when it comes to primary education (reading, writing, arithmetic, etc.); however, the way in which a school presents the material is just as important. In order to effectively engage indigenous students, lessons and materials need to consider the context of the local community. For example, in Kusi Kawsay, there are leftover history books from the Peruvian government. One section in a text discusses Christmas, and explains children can build snowmen and enjoy the snow during the Christmas season, however, in the Sacred Valley; Christmas is during their summer season. This book was clearly developed by North Americans who gave the texts to Peru without considering traditions during Christmas time are much different in Peru than in the United States.

Given the current situation, Ivan Illich in *Deschooling Society* supports alternative methods of education. In the text, Illich's main argument is that "schools are repressive institutions which indoctrinate pupils, smother creativity and imagination, induce conformity and stultify students into accepting the interests of the powerful" (Haralambos & Holborn, 1991, p. 236). The Kusi Kawsay Academy attempts to refute this idea and specifically utilizes the Waldorf method to cultivate and encourage students' creativity through discovery, art and music.

Bourdieu's book mentioned earlier continues to state that education "must include aspects of knowledge and elements of style which were common to each class, to avoid class bias (Bourdieu, 1970, p. 257). Sociologist Jane Torrey supports this standpoint, and agrees these concepts can even be applied to the education in the United States. She argues that lessons in the U.S. could be conducted in black speech patterns and Standard

English also taught (Torrey, 1986). Torrey found that “teachers were systematically imposing white values, language and culture upon black children. Children who were unable to adapt to this essentially alien culture were treated as potential failures” (Torrey, 1986, p. 298). These viewpoints all represent the problems with education policies and practices that fail to incorporate language, beliefs and learning structures of the community the school is operating in. This can apply to the topic of education in developing countries by showing the importance of different cultural contexts, even within the same country.

As mentioned, the idea of communities creating their own idea of a civil society is powerful, and I believe that educating youth with the Kusi Kawsay approach is a part of that goal. By allowing youth to understand their native culture, and cultivating children with a blend of Andean techniques and a holistic Waldorf approach, NGOs can assist in development which empowers communities.

According to author Aliya Kabdiyeva, published in the Asian Social Science journal, the international community has advocated for NGOs (often based in the Global North) to solve social problems, when the emphasis should include grassroots organizations (Kabdiyeva, 2013). The Kusi Kawsay Academy is an example of a grassroots organization attempting to advance development with an intricate understanding of the people they provide assistance for because the organization was founded by local community members. The school was founded by five native Peruvian families, and is entirely based in Peru. Because grassroots organizations are founded by

community members who truly understand the needs and complex background—they are often the most equipped to address these social problems.

As put by author Simon McGrath from the University of Nottingham, “In a world increasingly driven by ‘best practices’, ‘what works’, and targets, it is vital that we keep remembering that these are not simply technical matters but built upon very particular and highly contestable assumptions about the roles and purpose of education” (McGrath, 2012, p.367). Essentially, McGrath is arguing we must look more critically at the education model used in every instance and not apply a “one-size fits all” approach when it comes to education in developing countries. I concede that the alternative practices, used by Kusi Kawsay, have developed a model which draws on native Peruvian concepts and ideas, and stresses the importance of heritage and history in the Andean region. The academy works primarily in marginalized communities where children are not very likely to graduate secondary school and the school’s hope is to lower this number by reaching out to low-income communities and providing a strong, interdisciplinary education centered around Andean ideas.

After studying numerous examples of NGOs author McGrath claims it is clear there are examples of NGOs entering LDCs (less-developed countries) with little knowledge or research into the culture they are providing assistance for. According to critical authors, there is an essential problem when educating in developing communities because, “schooling for the marginalized often continues to work from the premise that they [the indigenous people] have deficits and need to be prepared to join the mainstream” (McGrath, 2014, p. 1). The mainstream, in this case, is Western culture.

A Stanford study by Mark Epstein and Kristi Yuthas with 2,000 primary schools operated by state governments, NGOs and private entities found that nearly all “educational programs typically adopt traditional Western models of education, with an emphasis on math, science, language and social studies” (Epstein, 2012, p. 2). I hope to further explore the effects of Kusi Kawsay using these Andean concepts and the Waldorf method in the primary school education, in lieu of the Western education models that Epstein and Yuthas affirm a majority of NGOs in their study utilized.

After reviewing works of literature from McGrath (2012), Epstein (2012) and Sulieman (2013) I came from the assumption that transferring the Western education model work to indigenous cultures would not work. However, I did not know what an education model that centers around indigenous culture and incorporates alternative methods of education would look like. After intense investigation, primarily using the Kusi Kawsay Academy, I hope to communicate my discoveries about empowerment through an education NGO built entirely around honoring students’ cultural heritage.

It is also important to acknowledge the gaps in the literature on educational approaches in less-developed countries. Currently, there are several articles and emerging authors who are critical of using Western methods of education to educate youth in various cultures, however, I have not been able to locate any research on the benefits behind using alternative methods of education and incorporating the native culture of indigenous students into a schooling structure. Research supporting incorporation of native cultural heritage (when educating youth) includes studies on the benefits of educating in the mother tongue. However, there is not substantial research on alternative

methods of education for youth and how to more fully incorporate the culture of native communities in the education. Through my research project, I plan to address these gaps by using the Kusi Kawsay Academy as a model for understanding alternative approaches for indigenous youth. By understanding the ways the academy achieves educational empowerment, I hope to demonstrate the advantages of using an approach that blends indigenous methods of education with alternative education models.

## Chapter 4: Research Process

Before beginning the remaining sections of the thesis, I want to outline my research methods and process. I began my study with a nonlinear research path with mostly qualitative research data. I began with researching information about claims of NGOs disempowering communities through various approaches and theories. From there, I selected an NGO to focus on that was situated within an indigenous culture. The NGO I selected, from my perspective, was distinct enough from traditional education systems to illustrate *how* an NGO or school should operate to lead to a sense of empowerment for the children it educates and the community as a whole. After this was established, I conducted individual interviews with teachers and administrators from the Academy to develop my understanding of how they empowered and honored the culture of the native students. I also utilized a documentary that was published by the Academy to further my understanding of the school. The approach during the interviews was more cyclical, or did not have a set conclusion before the research; rather I conducted my research and then began to draw my conclusions (Neuman & Robson, 2009).

To conduct research, I sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and conducted interviews using video conferencing software. I formulated a series of questions pertaining to the structure of the NGO, the education model and approaches used to highlight the native Andean culture. My primary focus during the “findings” section of this thesis will be based off of the interviews I collected during my field research and a documentary of interviews the academy had posted online.

### **Interviewing Procedure:**

I typed up a copy of questions I asked individuals questions pertaining to the organizational structure and educational approach of the Kusi Kawsay Academy (Appendix A). Dr. Alexander was my research advisor and was a part of the phone calls and video conferences; and he is fluent in Spanish. These two individuals helped minimize language barriers, but this is still a limitation that should be acknowledged because the primary researcher (myself) is not fluent in Spanish. I asked for verbal consent during the interview and read them the consent statement (Appendix B) so each participant understood the objectives and possible risks of the interview. I also had to comply with international wiretapping laws, and disclose all interviews were recorded. Finally, I sent each participant a feedback sheet electronically (Appendix C) to reaffirm them of the purpose of the interview and provide them with my contact information if any additional questions remained after the interview.

### **Limitations:**

In this section, I would like to acknowledge my restrictions of not being able to be in Peru. Unfortunately, this reality may have altered my conclusions, as opposed to if I had physically been present in the environment. Interviews were limited to only the perspective of the interviewee because I had to communicate using teleconferencing. I was able to gain a sense of the cultural context in which the education model is used from speaking with participants, however, I would like to acknowledge this limitation in my research. Due to funds and a slow IRB approval, I was not able to travel to the school, however, the research produced from video interviews was still beneficial to the study.



Another limitation to consider is my inability to interview or collect data from the children attending the academy. Because of Institutional Review Board (IRB) restrictions, interviewing or conducting research on children is almost never approved because of the high likelihood the questions or data collection could harm a child's psyche. Especially in my case, where I am accessing children's empowerment, some questions could rehash negative feelings imposed by being a part of a minority culture in Peru. Due to this, interviewing or surveying children was not something I was able to do. A final limitation is the fact that Waldorf schools (like Kusi Kawsay) have very little data to share that empirically signifies empowerment has taken place. Students are rarely given any standardized tests and teachers are encouraged to take anecdotal notes to show progress on an individual level. This makes it difficult to measure and show quantitatively that empowerment has taken place.

#### **Potential Risks for Participant:**

There are few anticipated future risks to participants from their participation in this study. The only possible risk is talking about the school in an unfavorable light and because this study will be able to be publicly accessed, this will allow others to read the comments about the school. Anonymity will be used for every participant and omission of statements will be used upon request. In the event the participant experiences anxiety about the answers they have shared, a debriefing process was provided at the end of the session and I reassured them I had their interests in mind and we would not share any information they would like to have omitted. The consent form and feedback sheet was sent electronically to the participant at the end of the interview and reviewed verbally

before the interview. Again, interviews in this thesis are kept anonymous and allowed participants to omit any information they shared. This risk was also thoroughly explained in their native tongue, and read verbally, so each participant understood the possible consequences.

## Chapter 5: Field Research from Kusi Kawsay Academy

I affirm that blending indigenous concepts and an alternative education method (Waldorf) and coming from a grassroots beginning has created a new vision for the future of NGOs operating in less-developed countries focused on education. After reviewing several organizations educating youth in Peru, the Kusi Kawsay Academy stands out as an organization that provides a “space for people to practice their traditional ways of life” (Kusi Kawsay, 2014). This emphasis on culture rebukes the conventional ideas that support universal education as a core curriculum based on knowledge and belief which includes mathematics, science, history, and literature (Lawton, 1991). Instead, the Kusi Kawsay Academy incorporates these fundamentals of learning, but adds curriculum that is culturally infused to embrace students’ background.

I intended to research the school initially to understand the alternative education model used in the classroom and how students benefit from the Waldorf education model. However, I discovered a sense of empowerment from not only from the education model, but also from the structure of the school, degree of community involvement, curriculum focused on cultural identity, and funding sources. Overall, I will focus on the Kusi Kawsay Academy, and through this example, this project investigated the benefits from the Kusi Kawsay approach and how these concepts/models can be transferred to other less-developed communities. Development Coordinator, Julia Fielding Wood, explains the academy was founded because the parents saw “a lot of discrimination, a lot of racism, [and] people were made to believe that their traditional way of life and values

were not worthy.” Throughout a documentary posted online by the school, teachers were asked about the primary mission and focus of the school. Tenth grade teacher and School Director Yovana Ramos Chirinos responds, stated “In our school we are basically preserving our Andean Cosmovision (our understanding of life and the universe) and we are also treasuring our ancestral traditions.” In order to accomplish this goal, the Academy teachers focus on key ideas from the Andean tradition, such as respect for the environment and the importance of agricultural.

The school enlightens students through the concept of “Pachamana” which is normally understood by Westerners as the Goddess of Earth. However, the idea of Pachamama extends to incorporate all of nature. The curriculum, which focuses on nature through the concept of Pachamama, exemplifies how the Kusi Kawsay Academy teaches through the concepts of the indigenous culture. Environmental stewardship and knowledge of ecology are ideas present in every culture, however, framing these issues through the idea of Pachamama presents the issue in a way that reaches children with more indigenous backgrounds in Peru.

This incorporation of these beliefs adds to the education of students by supporting universal ideas (such as environmentalism) through an approach that is familiar to the community. In Pierre Bourdieu's work *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* he maintains the most important factor in education is “not so much what is known (the content of knowledge) but the manner in which it is presented.” Bourdieu makes the claim that it is achievable to forge a common, or universal, curriculum; but the education system must select aspects of knowledge and elements of style that are particular to the

culture the organization is operating in. In other words, content is important, but presentation of the information is key to reach students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

A primary focus every day also revolves around songs and traditional instruments for the students to relieve energy and learn about traditional forms of music and expression. Founding parents and music teacher, Tita Monteagudo Zavallos, explains that her lessons focus on honoring the culture and music traditions of the Sacred Heart Valley in Peru. Zavallos states, “All my songs, as well as my dances, bring to life the way it was before...

this is significant for the children’s [learning]. We do it with a lot of love for them.” This teacher’s clear passion for the students seems to stem from her own personal connection to this region—something outside NGOs or educational organizations may not experience. While incorporation of native culture is an important element at the Kusi Kawsay Academy, there are clear indicators of their Waldorf approach also utilized by the academy.



Above is a lesson with students in a typical classroom at Kusi Kawsay where teachers expose students to objects and ideas through the Waldorf principle of discover (Dayka, 2012).

Zavallos continues to say the academy operates “using this pedagogy (way of teaching) based on songs, poetry, rhythm, creativity and expression. And through all of these elements we impart concepts to the children.”

Additionally, students are encouraged to follow their creative passions. This is contrary to a more traditional model that measures success in terms of the number of students who attend college. While children are supported if they decide to attend college, this is not how the academy measures success. The model is a student-focused model of education and



Students have music lessons using native Andean techniques and wear traditional clothing (Dayka, 2012).

administrator Marina explains that if a student is “more skilled in creating craft and arts, s/he is encouraged to follow that” (personal communication, March 31, 2015). In contrast to traditional models of education which measures success in terms of how many students attend college.

As outlined by 4th grade teacher and Pedagogic Director, Rosaura Farfan Aguilar, “In grades one through six, we do not give ideas to children, we do it in a way that the children awaken this knowledge that they have within themselves.” This policy of letting children “awaken knowledge” comes directly from Waldorf teachings that stress freedom of expression and a humanist approach. Through this approach, the Kusi Kawsay

Academy demonstrates how it is possible to take Western models of education and blend ideas, such as Pachamama and traditional music, into this approach. I conclude this method has led to students gaining a sense of empowerment through validating their cultural way of life. As mentioned, the concept of empowerment stems from the idea of a community creating their own form of “civil society.” This is impossible with the presence of an external NGOs or the state Peruvian government imposing external values, and transferring an outside model of education into these communities.

As put by one founding parent “the Kusi Kawsay serves as an inspiration for others. For other schools. For other institutions. For individuals. And for humanity.” This inspiration stems from a strong respect for indigenous culture, a grassroots NGO structure, a humanist approach, and true love for the students that only a community can provide. “Being rooted in our Andean tradition brings, not only a way of life committed to Andean dignity, but how we relate and interact with Pachamama (Goddess revered by Andean people)” expressed another founding parent of the Kusi Kawsay Academy. This deep commitment to Andean values is seen the Franco’s statement, and through the mission of the Academy. The mission statement of Kusi Kawsay Academy clearly defines or expresses what empowerment of youth in education will look like. The statement reads:

“Kusi Kawsay envisions accompanying children in their development, respecting their integral being, customs, history, mythology, worldview and tongue. We provide equal opportunity for girls and boys alike to participate in society with developed problem solving, creative decision making and acute leadership skills, woven with a common thread of an intact self-esteem and a richly dignified sense of cultural identity.”

This statement outlines how youth can be empowered and ways in which to honor native culture. After reading the mission statement, I assert this offers a more comprehensive definition of what ‘empowerment’ of less-developed communities should be through education.

The academy also bases their approach off of the Waldorf model which, according to the article “Why Waldorf Works,” is a method that “provides a richly artistic curriculum that responds to and enhances the child's developmental phases, from early childhood through high school, cultivates social and emotional intelligence. And connects children to nature” (AWSNA, 2014, p. 1). The Waldorf method is the fastest growing education model in North America and the statistics speak for themselves. According to the Association of Waldorf Schools in North America, Waldorf graduates are:

- “94% likely to attended college or university
- 89% of them are highly satisfied in choice of occupation
- 91% are active in lifelong education
- 92% placed a high value on critical thinking
- 90% highly values tolerance of other viewpoints” (AWSNA, 2014, p. 2)

The Kusi Kawsay Academy blends these two approaches by having teachers go through typical Waldorf training (which includes deep appreciation for the arts, and copious literature on the humanist perspective) and then bases the curriculum around exposure to Andean culture, concepts, and language. This training fosters a greater sense of pride in the indigenous culture and humanistic values. Teachers at Kusi Kawsay are required to attend workshops hosted at the Academy “that delve into deeper studies with the whole teacher body in order to expand their knowledge and develop their artistic and



pedagogical capabilities so they may integrate new elements into school activities that enrich their teaching abilities” (Kusi Kawsay Report, 2014, p. 8). This teacher training exhibits how the Academy blends the Waldorf teaching methods. The Waldorf method also focuses creative expression, and this is combined with Andean culture when students create artwork that reflects Andean symbolism.

### Grassroots Difference

As stated by Emma Lucas in the Department of Social Work at Carlow College, there is tremendous change that comes from grassroots organizations. The Kusi Kawsay Academy is a grassroots organization, and as such, it has a unique perspective, but also major challenges. As Lucas writes, “Grassroots social development movements challenge stereotypical images of ‘Third World’ as being powerless, ignorant and trapped” (Lucas, 2001, p. 185).

Lucas studied the Country Women's Association of Nigeria (COWAN) which is a self-governed NGO that emphasizes “popular participation and indigenous leadership” (Lucas, 2001, p. 187). The organization employs “macro-community development practice...and the recognition of individual and collective skills and talents” (Lucas, 2001, p. 189). While these concepts are more common today, this approach was quite radical in 1982 when COWAN was founded.

Additionally Awa (1994) boldly claims grassroots organizations are the only way for *true* development. Awa highlights there are three critical aspects of this “true” development which are:

- “Involvement—mental and emotional involvement, not just mere physical presence.
- Contribution—a motivation to contribute which requires creative thinking and initiative.
- Responsibility—an acceptance of responsibility which involves seeing organizational problems as corporate self-included problems.” (Awa, 1994, p. 431).

Awa views true development as an active process, motivated by those who live in the community. I affirm the Kusi Kawsay Academy promotes this type of development because it is a grassroots organization, started by parents who care for and love the children in the community. After looking at examples of other NGOs it is remarkable to see what strides have been made toward empowerment through utilization of skills, and a true desire for group cooperation (Lucas, 2001). The Academy is truly a group effort which aligns with their Andean roots. All decisions are made in the same process of a “general consensus” based off in the Andean political process. Because of the grassroots approach, development becomes more than “charity,” development becomes empowering citizens to address social problems on their terms and by their own efforts.

In a personal interview, one administrator explained that empowerment is at the core of everything the academy does. The organization strives for empowerment through respecting students’ cultural identity and how these concepts apply to modern times and the students’ age. The teachers and administrators move to equip students “with a way of fulfilling their full potential without judgment” (personal communication, March 31,

2015). Having Andean views and indigenous identity incorporated into the model allows students to rediscover their roots. Indigenous populations have not been well-received in Peru historically and students in state schools were often discriminated against, told not to wear traditional clothes, not allowed to grow their hair out, and essentially, told not to be Andean (personal communication, March 31, 2015). This focus of cultural identity is a result of being founded by parents and community members in the Sacred Valley who have a profound understanding of students' cultural background. Another strength of being a community-led initiative is the Academy staff truly understands the complex social issues facing these specific communities. Two common problems in the Andean communities that Kusi Kawsay serves are domestic abuse and financial difficulties. Because the Academy is operated by local community members, the organization has a rich understanding of the specific challenges these students face and how to best assist the students.

However, while there are benefits with being a grassroots organization, there are also difficulties. One major hindrance to grassroots organizations is the lack of funding available in the country. American based NGOs rely heavily on wealthy donors, corporations and the U.S. Government. These are connections to funds Peruvian families at Kusi Kawsay Academy simply do not have and "some of those sources go against the values of Kusi Kawsay" (personal communication, March 31, 2015). The Academy is very conscious of their funding sources and this can definitely be a challenge to accept or allow people to support the school. The Kusi Kawsay Academy is working to become be self-sustainable through selling textiles and agriculture, but one of the biggest challenges

is financial support. A few employees recount several instances where teachers give up pay to allow certain students to remain at the school. And while this is very meaningful, it is not a sustainable model. Teachers should be respectfully compensated for their efforts, and one area of improvement is expanding the organization's revenue sources from other self-sustained projects. According to the 2013 annual report from the Kusi Kawsay Academy, the school faced a \$15,000 deficit last year. Additionally, the school is still not fully completed because of a lack of funds. This means the academy is at full capacity with 95 students and some youth have had to be turned away.

In the education field, the Kusi Kawsay Academy has a unique perspective due to their grassroots origin. They aim to educate youth, but also strengthen cultural identity through also using a humanistic approach. However, the Kusi Kawsay Academy struggles to stay afloat financially because they do not have the connections other NGOs operating in Western countries may have or the funding state-run schools receive.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion and Discussion of Findings

In conclusion, this thesis project centered on the Kusi Kawsay Academy explores the complexities of development, the importance of cultural context and innovative approaches to educational empowerment. One of the major difficulties of this project has been the fact the school is very young, with 2013 being the first graduating class, and this made measuring success difficult. Another challenge has been demonstrating this educational approach has led to empowerment.

Because the Institutional Review Board (IRB) rarely allows any research or direct testing on children (and the process to conduct this research on children is very complex) this has limited my ability to concretely measure educational empowerment. From discussions with Kusi Kawsay staff, research on aspects of empowerment and an intense examination of the practices of the academy, I conclude that the Kusi Kawsay Academy achieves the aim of educational empowerment.

A main idea that supports this research comes from Deepa Narayan-Parker, who was commissioned by the World Bank in 2005 to compile research that measures empowerment. A notion present in this research discusses the theme of “emphasizing self-respect, equality of treatment and an end to everyday humiliation” of the poor and marginalized (Narayan-Parker, 2005, p. 386). I affirm that the approaches of the Kusi Kawsay Academy have the effect of instilling self-respect of students’ ethnic identity, and research from Narayan has shown this leads to empowerment. The Andean view and identity is incorporated into the education model for students to rediscover their roots. In Peru, indigenous populations have not been respected and a majority of these

communities were discriminated against. In state-run schools, many students were made to be ashamed of their Andean heritage. As stated in an interview, the academy seeks to let students “be proud of the culture and roots; to carry that proudly” (personal interview, March 31, 2015). It can be reasonably inferred that ending marginalization of children from Andean backgrounds leads to empowerment of those children. Empowerment in this sense can mean self-respect and optimism about one's abilities and future. The academy teaches native customs, history from the worldview of the indigenous people, mythology of pre-Columbian South America and supports the use of native tongue (Quechuan) which all leads to a child being informed and proud of their native culture. Primarily through these measures, the Kusi Kawsay Academy has created a curriculum and method of teaching that empowers through self-respect of ethnic identity.

I concede that this education model differs from some educational approaches in other less-developed communities that derive their curriculum and teaching methods from Western systems. I conclude that the innovative approaches of the Kusi Kawsay Academy also serves as an example for all NGOs operating in developing communities and affirms concepts about empowerment through certain development practices. Kusi Kawsay's approach also supports the idea that progress is best achieved through being highly knowledgeable about the cultural context and having high degrees of community involvement. A central ingredient to this alternative approach by the Kusi Kawsay is the fact that the academy is founded and operated by community members and parents of indigenous children. In this thesis, I aimed for the reader to further understand how the Kusi Kawsay Academy serves as an example to schools and nonprofits operating in other

less-developed communities around the world and how to achieve educational empowerment through honoring cultural identities. The Kusi Kawsay Academy truly stands apart from many organizations with their unique and innovative approach. By studying this school, my desire is this thesis can further the conversation about how schools in developing communities can continually improve upon the education received by students of every background.



Kusi Kawsay Class Photo

“*Solpayki*” – Thank you in  
Quechua

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## Appendix A

### Background Questions for Interviewee:

1. How long have you been the principal for Kusi Kawsay Academy?
2. Have you served the Academy in any other role?
3. Do you have a degree? If so, from what institution and in what subject?
4. Are you a native Peruvian? Do you have any connection to the Andean culture?
5. Have you worked in the education field anywhere else?
  - a. If so where?
  - b. Was there a specific education model used?
  - c. How does Kusi Kawsay Academy differ? (can elaborate on later)
6. What are some daily tasks here at the Academy?
7. How many students are enrolled in the academy?
8. How many faculty and staff do you have?
9. If you had to speculate, or make an educated guess, about how many students have a connection to Andean heritage?
10. Do you run any after school activities?

### Questions on the Education Model:

1. From your perspective, can you explain the education model and how the model you use in teaching incorporate the Waldorf method and indigenous Andean approach?
  - a. What specific methods do you use to achieve the goal of incorporating the Waldorf and Andean approach?
2. Do you know any students who have transferred from other schools?
  - . If so, how did they respond to the different model?
  - a. Did you get any feedback on what stood out to them?
  - b. Did they thrive, stay about the same, or do worse?

- c. Have parents given feedback on your approach?
- 3. Overall, how would you say students respond to the mix of Waldorf technique and emphasis on Andean culture?
- 4. From the time students enter to the time the graduate; do you personally see students develop a sense of pride about the Andean culture?
- 5. From incorporating Waldorf techniques, what growth have you seen in students?

**Questions on the Organization:**

- 1. Who or what entity donates funds for the school?
- 2. Has there been any data on the success of the school? (I.e. college degree rates, overall satisfaction, etc.)
- 3. How/why do you think students come to this academy specifically?
- 4. How do you select students? What characteristics describe a typical student (if any)?
- 5. What is the cost associated with attending the academy for families?
- 6. What grants or funds are available for students who cannot afford tuition? (if tuition is even charged)
- 7. What support have you seen from the community? What has the response been?
- 8. Being a grassroots NGO that is based in Peru and started by Peruvian families, what challenges have you seen in terms of...
- a. Funding and finding donors?
- b. Resources for the school?
- c. Support in the education model you chose?
- 9. Why did the parents (from your understanding) start this school that incorporates indigenous Andean culture? What was the motive? Did they see anything happening to their children's cultural understanding or the community that prompted this?
- 10. What are some major differences in terms of how your school is run compared to other Peruvian schools?
- 11. What are some differences in terms of programs and opportunities ?

## Appendix B

### **Consent Statement to be read to participant**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jace Prokupek and Dr. Paul Alexander, from the Department of Honors at Regis University. This project is being conducted as part of an Honors Thesis. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are connected to the Kusi Kawsay Academy.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness, perception, benefits, and weaknesses associated with the alternative education model used at the Kusi Kawsay Academy.

**Wiretapping statement:** This interview will be recorded over the phone and we wanted to notify you in accordance with International Wiretapping Laws.

#### **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

- Discuss and answer the questions asked by the researcher
- Share any insight you have about the operation of the academy
- Tell the researcher about any personal information that will assist with the study (only if you're comfortable doing so). For example, connection to Andean culture, education level, previous schools.
- You may ask to have anything omitted. Anonymity will be granted as well and we will not publish your name.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

One potential risk is the fact this research will be published by the Regis Honors Department and others may know what was said in the interview. However, names will be concealed to protect your identity. If there is anything you would like to omit after we discuss it, your wish will be respected.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

There is a benefit to education in the developing world. As NGOs expand their efforts and continue to educate children in developing countries, it is important to look at the

effects education models have on the native culture, and how to blend Western education techniques and Indigenous Knowledge.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Anonymity will be given to all research subjects to protect them from any negative effects that could be caused by publishing the research. The researcher and the researcher's faculty advisor will have access to the raw data, and results of data will be presented in aggregate form. After completion of the study, the consent forms and data will be stored for 3 years in a locked filing cabinet in the Regis College Honors Department.

This research is being conducted by a student as part of an Honors thesis. Therefore, records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by others. They are:

- Regis IRB that protects research subjects like you
- Officials at Regis University who are in charge of making sure that we follow the rules of research.
- Any faculty members who are co-investigators on this project may also contact you about your participation in the project.

## **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you sign the consent form but then do not complete the project, please write “withdrawn” on your original consent form, next to your signature, to indicate that you have chosen not to participate further.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

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## **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Regis University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Regis University, Office of Academic Grants, Denver, CO by phone at (303) 458-4206, or e-mail the IRB at [IRB@regis.edu](mailto:IRB@regis.edu). You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with Regis. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.



## Appendix C

### **Feedback Sheet (to be emailed or mailed to participant)**

Redefining the NGO Education Model

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#### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand the effects of the unique education model the Kusi Kawsay Academy has used. My study intends to further the overall understanding of *how* incorporating native culture leads to this empowerment. Additionally, I want to see the benefits of using an alternative education model, such as the Waldorf method used at Kusi Kawsay.

#### Method

The interviews that have taken place will be incorporated into my thesis. I am collecting and recording personal accounts to enhance my thesis. For the interviewing process, I recorded with a Sony voice recorder and took notes. I hope to talk openly and honestly to gain a better understanding of the culture and how the school operates.

#### Hypotheses

My hypothesis is that incorporating indigenous culture into the education model leads to a sense of empowerment. As seen in the background section, there is literature and research to support this claim. By studying the Kusi Kawsay Academy, I hope to enter into the conversation of redefining the education model used by educational institutions in less-developed communities.

#### Finishing up

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dr. Alexander or Jace Prokupek.